

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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LOVE NEVER FAILS #2

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13.1-13 NASB)

These verses are often quoted at weddings to encourage and exhort the newly joined in matrimony. Love never fails! Why? Because God is love, and God never fails! Love is greater than faith and hope. Why? Because love is the fulfillment of all that God is doing through His Son. Love is the fulfillment of the law; and when all is fulfilled, there will be no need for faith or hope, for all that is in the heart of God will become the reality of the universe. When the Father is *All* in all, then all will be filled with love. This is the purpose of God being worked out through the eons and which will be fully manifested at the consummation of the eons in, through, and by His Son.

But let us be very clear that the love that never fails is God's love, not the distorted view of love held and practiced by fallen man. The love that never fails is the love of God that **has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us**. This love cannot fail, so that when we see failures in relationships between believers, whether in marriage or in body life, it is because the love of God was not employed; it was rejected or suppressed somewhere along the way.

Without doubt, the saddest thing to watch is a marriage fail and end in divorce, or even long-lasting relationships between friends, siblings, or brethren in Christ fail and end in departure. When a marriage or relationship hits the rocks, it is not because love failed but because love was either absent or not in play. Why? Because love cannot fail; so when there is a failure of a relationship, it cannot be because of love. Simply, the love of God cannot and will not fail!

I have heard it said more than once when division crops up amongst the Lord's people gathered together as an assembly that the reason for the division is lack of love. In some of these cases, I have heard it said in reference to assembly life: "There is no love here." Actually, what should have been said is that the love of God was being rejected or suppressed, for if it were employed, the brethren would have been able to work their way through the difficulties. The same principle applies to all breaches in relationships. Simply, as the Lord's people, we have no excuse, for God has given us His love that never fails.

Scripture is full of examples of what love is not and, in fact, Paul gives us some examples. Love is not jealous. Love does not brag. Love is not arrogant. Love does not act unbecomingly. Love does not seek its own. Love is not provoked. Love does not take into account wrongs suffered. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. From this list, we can conclude, based on Paul's word, that when there is jealousy, bragging, arrogance, provocation, unbecoming and self-centered actions, unforgiveness, and rejoicing over evil, then love is absent.

One of the most insidious of these examples is taking into account wrongs suffered, which refers to unforgiveness. When love begins to depart between a husband and wife, it is not uncommon for one or both partners to bring up hurts or wrongs that were inflicted in the past. Things that happened many years prior all of a sudden come to the forefront as if they were yesterday, and these wrongs become swords thrust into the heart of the other as if to bring the person down into the pit. The temptation to bring up wrongs of the past that were not brought under the blood and forgiven when they first occurred is a mighty powerful destructive force that is used in many arguments between people, not just those bound by marriage. Unfortunately, bringing up the past in a hateful and unforgiving way, as if to inflict emotional pain on another, is the opposite of love. Yet, sadly, this technique is often used during arguments. Let us be clear that when this hate is employed, it is breaking the highest law of God, the law of love. Hate will always fail, for it brings forth death.

Paul also gives us another indication of what is not love, and in this, tells us that love is more than mere action, for it is based on the intention of the heart. **And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.**

Isn't this an amazing statement? Most of us would say that someone who gives to the poor is exemplifying love. However, this may not be the case, according to Paul. There is an issue of the heart. The heart is the very center of the person, who one is and how one acts and speaks. What proceeds out of the mouth comes from the heart (Matthew 15.18). Forgiveness comes from the heart (Matthew 18.35). Good and evil proceed from the heart, and so do love and hate. For this reason, God searches the heart to see the person's intention. Is the intent love or something else? God is looking for love. Without stating so directly, Paul was asking: Are your actions being done out of love or out of obligation or, even, out of some other motivation? For example, in the US, giving to charitable organizations is a tax deduction. People can give money to these organizations not to help the poor but to help themselves when it comes time to file their tax return. The same argument can be made for the many who respond to a pastor's demand that they must tithe 10% to them and their cause. To be sure, some give with a loving heart. Others give out of fear; after all, they are called thieves if they do not tithe. Yet, others give for the tax deduction.

Paul also referred to martyrdom as an example. One can give up his life for many causes, but if it is not based on love, then there is no profit. Some people become so obsessed over certain causes that they will often place their lives in danger to make their point. But is the intention of their heart love? Paul makes the same argument over outward manifestations of gifts of the spirit of God. Tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith, without love, lead to nothing. This is a warning not to be arrogant or proud of such things but to use them to build up the body in love. But there is a more insidious danger. There are many in our day flaunting themselves before the Lord's people with what appear to be gifts, but all they bring is bondage to those who fall prey to their self-exaltation and profit. We need to heed the Lord's warning that many will come in His name and will mislead many (Matthew 24.5). Run from such ones, for their way leads to destruction as they mislead many into lawlessness, on account of which most people's love will grow cold (Matthew 24.12).

Paul referred to when the perfect comes. What is the perfect? It is the greatest of these. What is the greatest of these? God's love that never fails! Let us love with the love of God.